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ABSTRACT

Planning the activities for an instructional development unit and evaluating how well it has performed requires a set of standards against which the unit can be compared. This paper proposes a set of standards developed from a variety of references and personal experiences with instructional development units from across the country. Thirty-eight characteristics of a model instructional development unit are presented in five categories: plans and goals, organization and administration, decision making, activities, and evaluation. Eighteen references are listed. (Author/THC)

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SUPPORTING REAL INNOVATION IN THE 80's — CHARACTERISTICS OF ID UNITS THAT WILL MAKE IT HAPPEN

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SUPPORTING REAL INNOVATION IN THE 80's--

CHARACTERISTICS OF ID UNITS THAT WILL MAKE IT HAPPEN

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While traditional instructional development unit activities often result in innovation by some faculty, such innovations are really not state of the art anymore. If instructional development units are to play a role in supporting the development and use of computers, home study courses, telecourses, teleconferencing, or any of the major technological opportunities now available, the old ways of operating may not work. This is especially true in times of extremely limited resources.

Perhaps as never before, instructional development units must pay very careful attention to how they are organized and how they operate. Institutions will not be able to "carry" an instructional development unit just because it seems like the right thing to do. The instructional development unit will have to produce results and be accountable for the resources it uses. These are certainly not new concerns. However, the competition for limited dollars now make the threat to the survival of instructional development units more real than ever.

While every institution may not be ready to leap into the use of high technology for instruction, many will probably not be satisfied if the instructional development unit just keeps pushing the same old instructional improvement strategies with the same old results. Overall, the track record for many instructional development units is not spectacular in terms of long lasting institutional or instructional change.

The literature on instructional development units is not overly helpful in planning and evaluating a unit's activities in hard economic times. There are references at the general level that suggest areas of emphasis for the instructional development unit (Abedor & Sachs, 1978, 1983; Bunch, 1982; Spitzer, 1980). There are references which focus on the process of change itself (Lindquist, 1976; and Zaltman, 1977). There are more specific works dealing with broad instructional development strategies (Perquist and Phillips, 1975; Gentry, 1980) and with heuristics on how to do instructional development (Brown, 1980; Haney, Lange & Barson, 1968; and Hammons & Wallace, 1976). There have also been a number of studies reporting characteristics of existing instructional development units (Alexander and Yelon, 1972; Bratton, 1978; Durzo, 1978; Lawrason, 1978; Lawrason and Hedberg, 1978-79; and Liebler, 1978-79).

The topic of instructional development unit administration has not been the most popular one in recent years, as the datedness of the previous citations suggests. Recent works tend to be variations on these earlier themes. The primary emphasis is almost always on how to do instructional development, not how to administer it. In fact, there is really only one book that really deals with administering an instructional program, and that dates back to 1975 (Diamond, et.al.). While still a good reference, it tends to promote only one way of operating. Something more at the heuristic level is still needed.

Planning the activities for an instructional development unit and evaluating how well it has performed requires a set of standards against which the unit can be compared. One set of standards can be drawn from the characteristics of a model instructional development unit. This paper presents such a set of standards.

The characteristics of the model instructional development unit were developed from the various references cited above and from my own experience with instructional development units around the country. There are 38 characteristics of the model unit organized into five categories:

Plans and Goals

Organization and Administration

Decision Making

Activities

Evaluation

It is not necessary for an instructional development unit to perfectly match all the characteristics of the model unit to be successful. Strengths in some characteristics can compensate for weaknesses in others. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the nature of the specific institution and its faculty in order to balance the characteristics of the model unit with those of the actual instructional development unit being considered.

The 38 characteristics of the model instructional development unit are presented on the following page.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MODEL ID UNIT

I. Plans and Goals

1. *A plan with short and long range goals, alternative plans and strategies for reaching those goals, and benchmarks against which to measure accomplishments*

   An ID Unit has so many options that without a carefully considered plan it is likely to drift and scatter its resources. Knowing where it is going makes it possible to chose effectively and efficiently among options, making the entire program stronger than the sum of its parts (activities). The plan should take into account the faculty and institutional readiness for innovation, change strategies, and the instructional problems that need attention.

2. *A comprehensive program that takes into account the faculty members' and institution's readiness for innovation, staff size, and availability of consultants*

   The overall level of readiness affects the kinds of changes that can be introduced. Where readiness is low, faculty and organizational development activities can be used to increase it. Instructional development, where the developer takes a major role, is usually too time consuming to reach many faculty, so it is impractical for a small ID program trying to establish itself. However, success on small ID projects where the developer really is only an occasional consultant, can increase the readiness for larger ID projects undertaken by the faculty themselves. Successful organizational development usually requires outside consultants to legitimize changes and help resolve internal conflicts. Each program must find its own balance of instructional, faculty and organizational development activities.

3. *A focus on improving instruction rather than encouraging the adoption of any one solution, e.g. media, behavioral objectives, mastery learning*

   There are many ways to solve instructional problems depending on the faculty, students and institution involved. Certain solutions are not appropriate in all settings or acceptable to all faculty, so being a proponent of one solution greatly restricts both the ID Unit's credability and its ability to offer maximum service to the institution.

II. Organization and Administration

1. *Formal rather than ad hoc status without direct teaching or faculty evaluation responsibility*

   The ID should not be just a short term single-project based program. It should not offer courses on a regular basis, supervise or evaluate faculty who are teaching courses. Its purpose should be service rather than management.

2. *Administrative independence for normal activities and a simple structure*

   There should be a clear path between the ID Unit and those who set institutional priorities. The ID Unit should not build its own empire of sub-units nor be deeply entangled in a bureaucracy that requires approval of every part of every project. Where feasible, the head of the ID Unit should report to the highest academic officer.

3. *ID staff of full-time personnel*

   Assistance of part-time experts or other faculty is valuable, but a full-time core staff is needed to establish credibility, continuity, and direction. Clerical and technical staff should also be full-time to insure their availability to meet the changing needs and priorities of instructional improvement projects.

4. *Staff with excellent ID skills and knowledge, awareness of many instructional models and approaches, strong interpersonal skills, openness, optimism, tolerance for uncertainty, and energy*

   Faculty members must feel comfortable seeking help from the ID Unit. Therefore, human relations skills may actually be more important to ID skills. Furthermore, since ID is a time consuming and frustrating process, the ID staff must have the right personality to be a change agent and teacher at the same time.

5. *Discretionary financial resources to support innovative projects, travel to visit innovative projects, consultants, visits by innovative faculty from other institutions, workshops, summer salaries, release time, and small development grants.*

   Not all of these activities need to be funded, but without some funds for this type of use, many faculty would not attempt innovation. The amount of money does not need to be prohibitive to demonstrate institutional support or to encourage faculty innovation. These funds do not replace initiative, dedication, or extra work by faculty; however, they are effective tools to increase the amount of faculty-initiated change.

6. *Basic support based on hard money*

   The ID Unit's level of activity may be expanded or restricted by the availability of outside funds; however, the core staff should not have to depend on writing grant proposals to hold their jobs. This activity and fulfillment of grant obligations robs the institution of the help an ID Unit can bring to the entire faculty. Such activity also reduces the credibility of the unit, and creates an image that they are primarily entrepreneurial with little support from the administration.

7. *Allocations of time and resources consistent with institutional needs and priorities*

While the ID Unit should be open to all faculty-initiated projects, it must be sensitive to the needs of the institution to insure that too much of its time and resources do not go for frills and trivial projects while more important projects are left waiting.

8. *Strong two-way communication, clearly defined roles, and referral of faculty between the ID Unit and media center*

While everyone does not need to be involved in every step of every project, there needs to be close coordination and cooperation between these two units. The faculty member should not simply feel handed-off to strangers as the focus of the project changes from design to production. Similarly, the production staff should not attempt to solve all problems with media even if that is the faculty member's initial request. The staff of the two units need to work together to give the faculty member the best possible advice and service.

9. *Easy access to media and space for consulting with faculty away from interruptions*

The faculty member needs to feel comfortable working with the developer and needs to see a smooth functioning, professional organization that is there to give its full attention to that individual. If it is hard or cumbersome for the developer to demonstrate media use, the faculty member is not likely to want to try it in the classroom. Meeting in the faculty member's office is sometimes a good idea, but there are often too many distractions and interruptions.

10. *Formal and informal ties to academic committees and goverance committees to give faculty a feeling of ownership and connection to the ID Unit, and to make sure information on instructional needs and alternatives flows easily to and from the ID Unit*

Casually relying on intermediaries or memos to carry information can lead to unintentional distortions or ommissions, or can result in decisions being made without the most accurate information and advice. The ID Unit must be sensitive to these groups which can act as opinion leaders and gatekeepers for instructional innovations. It is important that they work in cooperation with the ID Unit rather than against it. While the staff of the ID Unit should not spend all its time in meetings, specific procedures should be established to keep communication channels open and distortion free so the ID Unit can be represented at those meetings where its expertise would be most useful.

III. Decision Making

1. *Projects initiated by faculty rather than by direct intervention by the ID Unit or administration*

   The ID Unit does not need to sit idle, however. It can offer various activities to increase the faculty readiness so they will be more likely to seek the ID Unit's assistance.

2. *Regular input and support from administration and faculty leaders to make sure the ID Unit is in-tune with the institution*

   Keeping the lines of communication open and working can prevent the ID Unit from being too big a threat or from making serious political mistakes. It can also alert the unit to problem areas that need attention. Leaders who feel their input makes a difference will be more supportive.

3. *Flexible approach that is sensitive to faculty and institutional needs*

   The level of change that the faculty and institution will accept is governed by their readiness for innovation and perceived level of need. A dogmatic approach that does not account for this will run into resistance. There is no one right way to improve instruction or one best ID approach, so the ID Unit should be flexible.

4. *Faculty participation in project decision making*

   Long-term adoption and use of instructional changes is more likely if the faculty feel they had at least an equal role in its development.

5. *Projects based on a series of agreements*

   Many decisions are required in the ID process. The developer and faculty member need to make sure their assumptions are in the open and that they agree on and are satisfied with each decision. This needs to be done regularly throughout the project. Failure to do this can lead to later conflict, and abandonment or the need to make major revisions in the project. Making assumptions about what a faculty member wants or thinks is an unnecessary impediment to project success.

6. *Records of meetings, decisions and agreements*

   ID projects take time and can become quite complex. Brief written summaries of meetings can insure that small things do not get lost or develop into major conflicts later on. Furthermore, when one developer leaves, the written record makes it easier for a new developer to take over a project. Written records are also useful sources of data for evaluation and planning on how to improve the ID program's effectiveness and efficiency.

IV. Activities

1. *Activities appropriate for all levels of readiness to reach the widest possible audience*

   Seminars and workshops are good for those with less readiness, while ID assistance for larger projects may be more appropriate for those with more readiness.

2. *Activities at various levels to include individuals, departments, and institution-wide audiences*

   Some settings are more threatening than others; some settings are more appropriate for sharing information among participants; and some settings are more manageable for the ID Unit. Providing variety will attract the largest overall audiences.

3. *Emphasis on effective and functional solutions to instructional problems rather than on flasy or glossy materials and programs*

   Simple solutions are frequently more accepted by faculty, and can be designed and implemented in less time and at less cost. While quality is very important, if the initial effort is too flashy it will be impossible to constantly match that level without extra funds and ID help. When these extra resources are gone, the project may be abandoned. Going for elaborate solutions also limits the number of faculty that can be served.

4. *Initiative by the ID Unit to maintain project momentum*

   The ID Unit should take on the small, dirty, tedius or unpleasant tasks--if necessary--to avoid procrastination or hesitation on the part of faculty. The ID Unit should also attempt to share its energy and enthusiasm with faculty.

5. *Frequent personal contact between developers and faculty working on projects*

   The willingness to try a new approach and the success of that effort is often dependent on the amount of personal interaction and support from the developer.

6. *Small as well as large projects*

   Some faculty may only be ready to try a small project. If they are successful they may become ready for a larger project. The problem may only require a small project to solve it. The ID Unit should avoid making every project into a large one, and should offer its help to as many projects as possible.

7. *Promotion and recognition of the ID Unit and of those faculty who attempt projects*

Not all rewards need to be financial or under the control of others outside the ID Unit. Recognition is sometimes a very powerful reward. Seeing what others have done successfully is also a good way to encourage the more reluctant faculty to seek help improving their instruction and is a non-threatening way to publicize the services that are available. The ID Unit should never assume that administrators or faculty are aware of or understand all the things the ID Unit can do or what it takes to do them. They should be creative in finding different ways to regularly provide this kind of information.

8. *Balanced approach to behavioral objectives*

If too much emphasis is placed on the exact form and wording of behavioral objectives for a course, it may take all of the time and energy the faculty member has for course improvement. Some of that time could be better spent on other course improvement activities.

9. *Problems distinguished from symptoms*

While some faculty may be determined to work on symptoms rather than problems (e.g. revise a test that students have trouble passing rather than revising the poorly prepared instruction that causes the poor performance), the ID Unit must be able to tell the difference. They may choose to work on the symptom to increase the faculty member's readiness for further changes, or because working on the symptom is beneficial in its own right, or to build up the ID Unit's credibility. However, if correcting the symptom does not solve the problem, the ID Unit may lose credability. Therefore, the ID Unit should know whether it is working on a problem or symptom so it can decide whether to try to change the faculty member's perception of what is needed or to spend its resources on taking care of the symptom.

10. *Recognize that others have innovative ideas that work*

The ID Unit should facilitate and promote change rather than regulate it or act as its gatekeeper. The unit must avoid the "not invented here" syndrome. It should make use of every good idea it hears about or that faculty come up with on their own.

11. *Procedures for administrative and colleague support built into every large project*

Specific steps should be taken to involve administrators and colleagues in the planning, development and implementation stages of large projects so they will be supportive of the innovative faculty member over the long run. They do not need to have decision-making roles or specific tasks to perform, but they should be kept informed and be able to offer input.

12. *Follow-up of past projects to prevent small problems from leading to the project's collapse and to learn from these projects for the future*

Many things can go wrong for an innovative instructional project after the initial implementation and try-out. Initial faculty excitement and enthusiasm can overcome many shortcomings in the project. With time this interest and energy can wane. Therefore, the developer's continuing interest can help renew the faculty member and keep small problems from causing the use of the project's outcomes to be abandoned.

13. *Continuing professional development of the ID Unit staff*

The staff needs to continue to upgrade its ID skills as well as keep informed about new instructional models and approaches that faculty can use.

V. Evaluation

1. *Data gathering and formative evaluation designed into every project*

Decision throughout a project should be made based on data. Identifying the questions and data collection strategies in advance makes it less likely that this function will be sacrificed to time pressures as the project progresses. Frequent formative evaluation of the various components of an innovative instructional approach is more efficient than leaving all evaluation to the end of a large project when meaningful revision is probably impossible.

2. *Detailed summative evaluation using a variety of techniques for every project*

Most measurement techniques are too imprecise to give a complete picture of the outcomes of a project. It is not enough to just use test scores as a measure of an ID project's success or failure. Student interviews, opinion surveys, detailed case studies of students, etc. should all be used whenever possible.

3. *Student opinions and suggestions collected as part of every evaluation*

Students can provide the only direct information on the strengths and weaknesses of a course design and course materials.

4. *Willingness to abandon failures and continues support during project revisions*

There are many reasons why a project can fail--faculty resistance, institutional resistance, changes in curriculum, changes in resources, etc. Careful data collection will allow the ID Unit to determine the reasons for the failure and determine whether it is feasible to attempt a revision. Not all projects should be continued since the cost of revision is too high for the potential for success.

The ID Unit should be realistic and avoid approaching every project with missionary zeal to "save" the students or faculty member. Conversely, the ID Unit should not assume that first drafts will always be successful. Revisions should be expected. These revisions should receive the ID Unit's support just as the initial design phases did.

5. *Established criteria for ID Unit success*

The ID Unit and administration should agree in advance on the criteria for judging whether or not the ID Unit is successfully meeting its goals and fulfilling an important institutional function. These criteria should then be considered in the planning of the ID Unit's activities.

6. *Documentation of its work and impact*

Thorough documentation is necessary for planning and for reporting to the administration. This documentation should summarize the accomplishments, effort, and range of activities of the ID Unit. A simple count of how many faculty have been served is probably not sufficient. To gather enough data it is probably necessary to periodically follow-up former participants (or a sample of participants) to identify long-term effects or suggestions for improvements in the ID Unit's activities.

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